

Spring 2017

# Administrator and Teacher Perception of School Culture

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ADMINISTRATOR AND TEACHER PERCEPTION OF SCHOOL CULTURE

A Specialist Project  
Presented to  
The Faculty of the Department of Psychology  
Western Kentucky University  
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Specialist in Education

By  
Luke Pniewski

May 2017

ADMINISTRATOR AND TEACHER PERCEPTION OF SCHOOL CULTURE

Date Recommended April 18, 2017

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## Acknowledgements

I am extremely indebted and grateful to all those who assisted me in completing this project. To Dr. Gary Houchens, thanks for all the guidance, diligence, and patience for the wisdom and assistance from the beginning, and guiding to the end. Without his hard work and reassurance, I don't know if I would have ever gotten done. I'd also like to thank Dr. Stacy Leggett for her hard work and time for the suggestions. I'd like to thank Dr. Amy Shutt and Dr. Chris Wagner for being two of the first people to be so passionate about school culture and are the people who were the driving force behind this idea and unknowingly got me started. I'd like to thank my co-workers for taking the time to participate in this study, and not being shy to give answers, and being bold enough to take a risk that this may spark a positive change in our school. I want to thank my wife for her patience in the completion of this project as I know there were late nights, early mornings, and full weekend where all sacrificed to get this completed.

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## ADMINISTRATOR AND TEACHER PERCEPTION OF SCHOOL CULTURE

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May 2017

73 Pages

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This study measured the culture of Barren County High School using the School Culture Triage Survey. The survey was administered to the teachers and administrators separately to assess the difference of the perception of the school culture within that school. The research suggests that improving a schools culture will increase teacher moral, teacher and administrator cohesiveness, and increase students' achievement. The results of this research show that the overall school culture is perceived very similarly between the two subgroups (teachers and leadership) but there are areas of the schools culture that are perceived differently, and if improved, can lead to significant gains for teachers and student learning and achievement.

## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

School culture and climate are among the top factors affecting student achievement (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1997). Deal and Peterson (1998) stated “Parents, teachers, principals, and students often sense something special and undefined about the schools they attend” (p. 28). The “something special and undefined” that they refer to is the culture of the school.

Even though school culture is difficult to define, it can be “extremely powerful” and often it is taken-for-granted and over-looked in schools (Deal & Peterson, 1998). Culture has a deep impact on many facets of schools, typically parts of the school that cannot be measured with a test, but that greatly impact learning outcomes and test scores (Melton-Shutt, 2004). The culture can impact how staff dress and interact with each other, what they talk about, to the instruction happening in each classroom, and even the willingness of students and staff to change (Deal & Peterson, 1998). These are all important aspects of a healthy school culture where the people involved share common goals and have a constant agreement on how to do things and what is actually worth doing (Wagner, 2008).

Anybody who spends time in schools can distinguish between different school climates. Deal and Peterson (1998) define and give examples of negative (toxic) cultures and the benefits of a positive school culture. Negative, or toxic, school cultures are where the staff is extremely fragmented, where addressing students and the needs of those students is no longer the main objective. This leads to environments that serve adults more than the students. Examples include teachers who attack new ideas, criticize



teachers who are concerned with student achievement, and make fun of teachers willing to go above and beyond what is expected (Deal & Peterson).

In contrast to the negative and toxic cultures, there are many opportunities provided by positive cultures, such as increased student learning (Deal & Peterson, 1998). These are schools where the staff has a shared sense of purpose, healthy communication, and strong, positive collegial relationships among the staff. These schools also celebrate traditions, improvement, hard work, and share an overall feeling of support for each other within this school, not just from administrators to teachers, but from teachers to other teachers, and even positive parent communication and celebration (Deal & Peterson, 1998). Cultural values will be reflected by the actions and behaviors of the administration, teachers, support staff, and the students. In some schools, the building itself will reflect the values of the staff and administration. Most importantly, a school's culture is a direct reflection of the principal and leadership team in charge of that school (Hallinger & Heck, 1998). Accordingly, the culture can be manipulated by those in authority dictating what they deem important.

The principal is not only the physical figure head of the school, he or she dictates the culture, either intentionally or unintentionally (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Fink & Resnick, 2001). This project explores the differences in perceptions of school culture between administrators and teachers in a single school. This study will use Wagner's School Culture Triage Survey (2008) and focus groups to explore differences between teachers and school leaders regarding three important dimensions of school culture: professional collaboration, affiliative collegiality, and self-determination and efficacy,

and the implications of these differences for school improvement efforts. Consequently, four research questions will guide this project.

1. What are the differences between administrator and teacher perceptions relative to the cultural dimension of professional collaboration?
2. What are the differences between the perceptions of administrators and teachers regarding affiliative collegiality?
3. What are the differences between the perceptions of administrators and teachers regarding self-determination and efficacy?
4. What are the implications for the school's on-going improvement efforts?

These are the main ideas that are explored using Wagner's (2008) "School Culture Triage Survey." I will be analyzing the "School Culture Triage Survey" data from administrators and teachers separately, to compare the perception of school culture from administrators to that of the perception of teachers.

### **Practical Significance**

The proposed research questions are important because common goals and collaboration among educators are important factors in student achievement (Hattie, 1998). If administrators and teachers perceive the culture differently, the difference in perception of school culture may suggest poor communication or lack of a clear, common goal. If all the staff does not perceive the same culture within a school, this project will highlight the areas of inconsistency. If the staff shares the same perceptions, then the project will highlight areas that can further improve the school culture. Melton-Shutt (2004) has established a positive relationship between school culture and performance on

standardized testing. This can be important information to other schools as well. By following the survey and focus group strategy of collecting data on perception of culture, the discrepancies can be addressed.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Literature Review**

School culture and its impact on achievement have been studied for decades (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeal, 2009; Deal & Peterson, 2009; Hoy, 2008). This literature reveals that culture is an important factor in determining educational outcomes in school, and can be impacted greatly by leadership within a building.

#### **What is school culture?**

There is a difference between school climate and culture (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2007). The climate of a school can be defined as “a general term that refers to the feel, atmosphere, tone, ideology, or milieu of a school” (Hoy, 2008, p. 1). Sparks puts great importance on school culture and its impact on staff and how leaders can directly impact the culture of a building (2005). These are all characteristics that can be seen and measured with the school. Furthermore, Gruenert (2008) distinguishes between culture and climate in schools. Climate can be best summarized as what can actually be physically seen within a school. This includes characteristics such as the building itself, the teachers in the building, and written procedures and policies within the school. Culture can be summarized as “...the collective actions and common set of expectations of a group” (Gruenert, 2008). Phillips (1996) defines culture as the “beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors which characterize a school.” This extends beyond the physical aspects of the building, encompasses behaviors in and out of school, and takes into account the traditions of the school. These traditions and celebrations help develop a sense of community, family, and team membership within the school (Wagner, 2008).

Sparks (2016) described school culture as “just how things are” within a school and frequently is a powerful but often invisible force that can either support continuous improvement of teaching and learning, or can thwart it. There are various types of cultures that can exist in schools, mainly positive and negative (Deal & Peterson, 2009). In a school with a positive culture, there is a cohesive attitude of the teachers and administrators, and it can even be seen in student behaviors and attitudes. The teachers and administration pass along the positive that is happening, and they support and celebrate each other (Deal & Peterson, 2009). Negative or toxic school cultures have perpetual and continual conflicts and serve adults, rather than the children in the building (Deal & Peterson, 1999). These conflicts are between teachers, administrators, other staff, students and even parents. There is an overall negative subculture within the school. This does not get discussed or addressed, but everybody understands how it works. The staff in these types of cultures does not continually support or celebrate each other. There is even a negative impression that not all students can learn, and are content in their negativism (Deal & Peterson, 2009). Positive cultures are easier to spot within schools because every school is willing and eager to demonstrate what is going well and what they do well. Characteristics like a clear and shared focus, high standards and expectations for all students, effective school leadership, curriculum alignment, and effective teaching are easy to identify in schools with positive cultures and are consistent in high-achieving schools (Shannon, 2009). Other factors, including effects with a negative impact, are much harder to navigate because they are only indirectly felt by students, teachers, administrators, and the general public. “Parking lot discussions” and

informal, candid conversations among the faculty, support staff, students and general public are an easy way to judge the values connected to the school. This type of setting is more conducive to get accurate feelings about the school.

A quick Google Scholar search of “School Culture” retrieved 1.69 million research studies and reveals the various dimensions of culture identified by researchers. A study by Macneil, Prater, and Busch (2009) investigated 29 schools that differed in culture. The researchers used the Organizational Health Inventory (Miles, 1971). This inventory consists of 10 key internal organizational dimensions: Goal Focus, Communication Adequacy, Optimal Power Equalization, Resource Utilization, Cohesiveness, Morale, Innovativeness, Autonomy, Adaptation and Problem-Solving Adequacy. These 10 dimensions portray aspects of successful climates among members of an organization (not just schools) as well as the ability of that organization to manage stress from within or outside of the organization (2009). These dimensions also point toward qualitative data that can assist leaders in identifying the effectiveness of the organization. Goal focus is the ability of people, groups or organizations to have clarity, acceptance and support of goals and objectives. Communication adequacy is the efficiency and frequency of relatively important information shared within the organization. Optimal power equalization is the ability to maintain a relatively equal distribution of influence between members and leaders. Resource utilization is the ability of the organization to work together efficiently with minimal stress. Cohesiveness is when all individuals have a clear sense of identity and are often emotionally invested in the organization. Morale is when a person, group or organization feel professionally

satisfied with the work and outcomes. Innovativeness is the ability to change and adapt to new environments within the organization. Autonomy is when the organization has the ability to self-regulate and meet goals without external demands. Adaptation is the ability to tolerate stress. Problem-solving adequacy is the ability of the organization to identify and solve problems with little stress and energy output (Macneil et al., 2009).

The Organizational Health Instrument (OHI) consists of 80 items, 8 for each of the 10 dimensions, with each being rated on a 5 point Likert-type scale. The instrument has been used previously to provide data on the internal workings of schools and organizations, and has proven to be a reliable measure. A score is then assigned to each dimension for each organization, and the percentile scores are then determined from the raw scores from the OHI. The *Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS)*, the state assessment used for schools in Texas, was used as the basis for assigning an accountability rating to each school. They looked at schools that were rated “Exemplary Schools”, “Recognized Schools”, and “Acceptable Schools” according to student achievement based on the State of Texas Accountability Rating System, and then compared them using the 10 dimensions of the Organizational Health Inventory that was discussed by Gerald Hill (2003).

Assessing organizational health is a measure of the organization’s ability “to function effectively, cope adequately, to change appropriately and to grow from within,” which can be assessed and linked to creating an optimum learning environment for all students (Hill, 2003, p. 27). Macneil et al. then used this same investigative tool, which consists of principal estimation of teacher results and a teacher survey, and applied it to

29 schools in a large suburban district in Southeast Texas that varied in school ratings. There was no significant difference between schools that scored Exemplary and Recognized, but there was a statistically significant difference between Recognized schools and Acceptable schools on the Organizational Health Dimensions of Goal Focus and Adaptation. This implies that at the high end of the spectrum, there is not a significant difference, but between the higher achieving schools and the Acceptable schools, there is a significant difference in the influence of culture on achievement as evidenced by the survey. The findings suggest that students achieve higher scores on standardized tests in schools with healthy learning environments (Macneil et al, 2009).

### **The Link between School Culture and Achievement**

Determining a culture of a school can be difficult, especially when working in a school. People within a school know the protocols and procedures, they have coworkers that they interact with on daily and weekly basis, but, without having knowledge of the administrative team, coworkers, and how everybody else is working, they may or may not know the extent of the culture within the school. The underlying question now becomes: How can we determine if a school's culture is positive or negative? Is it supportive or toxic? There are very few research based tools to measure the culture of a school. One tool, which has been used by several researchers to quickly survey school culture, is the School Culture Triage Survey. It was developed and modified by Phillips (1996), Phillips and Wagner (2002), and Wagner and Masden-Copas (2002). Phillips conducted more than 3,100 school culture assessments from 1981 to 2006, and found school culture and student achievement closely linked (Wagner 2006). This was also



reflected by a study with 61 Florida schools (Cunningham, 2003). In this study, the researchers found that the higher the score on the survey, the higher the students scored on Florida's Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) in reading. The lower the survey score, the lower the reading scores. All of these studies show the direct correlation of school culture and student achievement.

A study by Kraft (2014) revealed significant connections between school climate and improved instruction. In this study, climate examples such as safety and academic achievement reflect what most interpret as school culture. In this study, the research measured factors such as safety and academic expectations, and found that improved climate can be the equivalent to an extra six weeks of math instruction. The study also revealed a reduction in teacher turnover, as much as 25% in some cases. These results, increased academic expectations and reduced teacher turnover, both positively impact school culture.

The School Culture Triage Survey has been used throughout the United States and Canada to assess a school's culture quickly and accurately. The survey measures three main categories of school culture: Professional Collaboration, Affiliative Collegiality, and Self-Determination/Efficacy. The survey is a typical Likert scale style questionnaire, where questions are ranked from 1-5, 1 being never and 5 being always, that consists of 17 questions divided into three main categories: Professional Collaboration, Affiliative Collegiality, and Self-Determination/Efficacy. Once the teachers complete this survey, the data are then averaged and a score is given to the school. If a school scores under 40, this is a school that is in need of immediate attention as this is very low on the scale. A

score from 41 to 59 is a low score and needs to be addressed but not identified as an emergency. A score between 60 and 75 indicates the school has a healthy culture, and major adjustments are not needed. A score of 75 would imply that the school has a very positive culture, but no school has ever scored this high.

The School Culture Triage Survey has been used to make a connection between scores on the survey and scores on the state mandated scores (Melton-Shutt, 2004). According to Melton-Shutt (2004), the higher the scores on the School Culture Triage Survey, the higher the scores on state mandated testing. In this study, Melton-Shutt utilized the School Triage Survey to gather quantitative data on the perceived relative health of the culture of 66 different elementary schools in Kentucky. Data were compared with each schools score on the 2004 Kentucky Commonwealth Assessment Testing System. Data were analyzed to compare how well each school performed on the state mandated standardized test with how high or low each school scored on the School Triage Survey. Melton-Shutt found the higher a school scored on the state mandated standardized test, the higher the school scored on the School Triage Survey. The data suggest that the healthier the school culture, the higher the scores on the state mandated testing.

According to Macneil et. al (2009), schools with higher achievement consistently exhibited healthier school climates. They ranked a sampling of 29 schools in a suburban school district in southeast Texas according to their performance on state mandated testing (The Texas Assessment of Academic Skills or TAAS), then compared these results to the teacher survey of the Organizational Health Inventory (OHI). The OHI is a

Likert style survey where staff rank the frequency of behaviors using questions from 1 (Rarely Occurs) to 4 (Very Frequently Occurs). The survey is 44 items long and the totals are then calculated. Ninety nine percent of schools completing the OHI receive a score between 200 (very low) to 800 (very high) with average schools scoring 500. A total sample of 1,727 teachers completed the survey at these schools. The results were consistent across the study where the higher the schools ranked on the list according to the TAAS, the higher the schools ranked on the OHI. Also of note, survey dimensions including “Goal focus” and “Adaptation” were found to be most predictive of the academic success of the students. When student achievement is a large part of the equation to each school’s accountability, improving the school culture may improve student learning.

### **The Link between Principals and School Culture**

The role of school leaders is to communicate core values and support the teachers and students within the school building (Deal & Peterson, 1999). The teachers then support the leaders in actions and words, and pass this along to the students and parents. The parents then are more apt to participate in the school, not just as volunteers, but in the form of representing themselves in the governance meeting, board actions, and even the everyday events at the school (Deal & Peterson, 1999). Effective leaders don’t simply communicate their own ideas; they understand the history and context of the culture. They know the current condition of the school, and they build on what is important to the teachers, students, and community. Then, they pass on the core values

and reinforce the elements that are positive and perpetuate the culture (Deal & Peterson, 1999).

Hallinger and Heck (2010) have summarized the impact of the school leader on student achievement, mainly in the form of creating conditions that support effective teaching and learning. This, in turn, builds the capacity for professional learning of teachers, therefore assisting change within a school. Hallinger and Heck employed a conceptualization that they have called “collaborative leadership” where the focus is on strategic, school-wide actions. These actions are specifically directed toward school improvement and the responsibilities are shared among the principal, teachers, other administrators, and others within the building. This not only divides the responsibilities and make it less likely to those involved with new responsibilities be overwhelmed, but also produces genuine buy in from staff throughout the building. This empowers the staff and students, encourages broad participation in decision making, and fosters shared accountability for student learning. When more people are involved in the accountability for student learning, there is school-wide effort in increasing that student learning.

Hallinger and Heck (2010) randomly sampled 198 elementary schools in a western state in the U.S. Within these schools, a cohort of all third grade students participated in the study, which lasted for four consecutive years, and collected longitudinal survey data on leadership and school improvement on three occasions in the four years, the first being the school year beginning in 2002 and ending in 2003. The survey explored perceptions of leadership and school improvement capacity collected from teachers on three occasions in the four years of the study. Collaborative leadership

was measured by nine items that describe teacher perceptions of leadership within the school. These items represent three dimensions including; 1) making collaborative decisions focusing on educational improvement, emphasizing school governance that empowers staff and students, 2) encouraging commitment, broad participation, and shared accountability for student learning, and 3) emphasizing broad participation in efforts to evaluate the school's academic development. The researchers then measured growth of the students over the three year period, defining growth as changes in the math and reading scores over the four year period. The researchers tracked data on individual students to monitor the progress of the students in the study which captures the actual growth of these students over several years and provides a way of recognizing that schools serve students who start at different places and progress at different rates. Their findings were consistent with earlier studies of principal leadership efforts. The first notable finding was that improvement in collaborative leadership was positively related to improvement in school capacity. Second, the change in school capacity positively affected growth in math. Third, the researchers found a small, positive, indirect relationship between changes in collaborative leadership and growth in student learning in reading and math. Another intriguing finding was that the researchers confirmed the existence of an indirect feedback loop between leadership and learning. This tells us that the better the leadership, the better the academic outcomes, and leadership and academic outcomes can both be improved. Improvement in leadership leads to improvement in academic outcomes, such as scores on mandated tests. This supports Hattie's finding of feedback having a very strong impact on student learning (1999).

The culture and climate of a school is established by the long standing traditions and faculty within a building, but it can be highly influenced with instructional leadership via the school's principal (Macneil, 2009). Even when there are strong cultures, whether positive or negative, the principal is central to changing that culture, if needed (Macneil, 2009). There is further research that suggests one of the most influential actions that a principal can demonstrate within a school is to promote a strong vision for the school itself in the form of a mission and vision statement and actively reflecting this mission and vision (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom, 2004).

Developing a school culture can be a difficult task, especially if the culture within a building is toxic and negative. The principal can shift the culture easily by placing the correct personnel in the correct locations, and by hiring new staff that will support the common mission of the school. The principal is, in fact, responsible for selecting and promoting staff that is highly qualified and able to instruct and engage students (Fink & Resnick, 2001). In many cases, principals are simply managers, they take care of scheduling, budgeting, dealing with parents and other issues not related to instruction. Instructional leadership has often overlooked, but was often expected of principals, and still is. A true instructional leader will be a good judge of high quality teaching and address teaching that is unsatisfactory, which will improve a high quality teaching staff (Fink & Resnick, 2001). But instructional leadership is only one way to lead; there are other ways to lead a school. Instructional leadership is most focused on the improvement of the classroom instruction, which is an important factor in student learning and achievement, but not the only form of leadership that can be implemented in a school,

and depending on the culture, it may not be the type of leadership needed in that school (Leithwood *et al.* 2004). In some schools, mainly toxic learning environments, transformational leadership would draw attention to broader conditions that may need to be changed within the school with less of a focus on the specific classroom strategies.

Hallinger and Heck (1999) conclude that school leaders do have an impact on school effectiveness and student achievement, even though it may be small and indirect, they assert that it is still measureable and significant. Strong, consistent school leadership can help develop a positive school culture, which in the end, is a large determinant in the schools effectiveness and student achievement.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Method**

This section includes a description of the purpose of this project and an overview of data collection instruments used in analysis used for this study.

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the overall school culture; evaluate the perspective of school culture from a teachers' and administrators' perspective; and to determine if the perspectives were similar or if they varied, and to identify which aspects of the school culture were viewed significantly differently between the two survey groups. The potential benefit from this study would be to improve the individual weaknesses in the schools culture. Improving specific aspects will increase the entire school culture and improved school culture will benefit the teachers' moral (Beets, 2008) and increase achievement (Deal & Peterson, 1998).

#### **Participants**

In total, there are 75 certified teachers at Barren County High School and 12 people that make up the leadership team in the form of administrators, guidance counselors, the athletic director, and the curriculum coordinator.

Barren County High School is a traditional Title I public high school located in Glasgow Kentucky. It serves students that live in Barren County, and there is also an open enrollment program where students from surrounding counties and the local independent school district can attend, even if they live out of district. According to the Kentucky Department of Education School Report Card for the 2015-2016 school year, the school had a total population of 1,257 students with an average daily attendance of



1206, which is a 95.9% daily attendance rate. In 2015-2016 there were 75 full time, certified teachers, and 100% of the teachers are classified as “white (Not Hispanic)”. There are 30 males and 45 females. (KDE, 2017)

According to the United States Census Bureau, Barren County consists of about 38,000 people total, 94.3% white, 4.1% black, 0.15% Native American, and the rest consisting of other races such as pacific islander, Asian, “other races” and 2 or more races. The median income for a household in Barren County was \$31,240 and the median income for a family was \$37,231 in 2000.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

The “School Culture Triage Survey” was administered to all certified staff in the building (Appendix A), and dispersed via email using Google forms. This included all teachers, administrators, guidance counselors, media center personnel, and the school athletic director. This instrument consisted of 17 survey questions on a Likert Scale, that participants rank from 1 (never) to 5 (always), and each participant could only respond to the survey once. The survey was broken down into three categories, collaboration, collegiality, and self-determination/efficacy. For each of the items, the participants selected their responses to indicate which statements most closely aligned with the practices at their school (1 = Never, or almost never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often, and 5 = Always, or Almost Always).

The focus group interview questions were initially modified from Phillips and Wagner (2009) and are tentatively planned as follows:

- 1) Tell me about the ways teachers work together to improve their instruction.

- 2) Tell me about how who establishes the behavior code and how it is monitored and enforced.
- 3) Describe the relationships among staff and some examples.
- 4) How does this school go about solving problems?
- 5) What is the instructional vision for this school? Who establishes it and how is it monitored?

These were slightly modified following the initial analyzation of the survey responses to clarify reasoning behind responses to the survey. The actual focus group questions used were as follows:

- 1) Tell me about how teachers and staff work together to develop the school schedule.
- 2) Tell me about how who establishes the behavior code and how it is monitored and enforced.
- 3) Describe the relationships among staff and some examples.
- 4) How does this school go about solving problems?
- 5) What is the instructional vision for this school? Who establishes it and how is it monitored?

### **Data Analysis**

The data for teachers will be analyzed separately from that of the data from the administrators, guidance counselors, athletic director, and curriculum coordinator, as these are considered to be the school's leadership team. Each survey question was

averaged for each group; one for teachers, the other for administrators. The average scores for each group were then compared.

Google forms will tabulate and organize data and also separate the data into the previously mentioned groups. Since the data was separated, I could then determine how the culture is perceived from the teachers' perspective and then again how the culture is perceived from the administrators' perspective. The data from the two groups will then be compared. If the overall perceptions of school culture are similar from the two groups, the areas of need will be highlighted from the survey. If the overall perceptions are different from the two groups, there is a cultural issue that needs to be addressed. I can then determine that there is a discrepancy between the perceptions of the teachers and administrators in the building, and steps need to be taken to clarify and communicate the needs of the school to everybody. This will begin to give all persons in the building a common purpose.

### **Focus Groups**

Two focus groups will be conducted. The first group was the teachers, and a consent form was signed by each of the participants (Appendix C). The focus group for teachers consisted of a total of 8 teachers of various experience levels. Every content area in the school had at least one person in the focus group session. The science department had two people represented. The "Fine Minds and Bodies" department also was represented by two people; this is the grouping of teachers that teach Art, PE, Humanities, Band, Orchestra, and Chorus. Every other department, Social Studies, ECE, Business, and English, had a single representative in the focus group session. This was to

get a perception of teachers from all content areas and each teacher had been at the school for at least six years. This session was intentionally held in a classroom far away from the front offices. The group was reassured that the responses were going to remain confidential and that the participation in this project would not affect their professional career.

The second focus group session consisted of the administrators each participant signed a consent form (Appendix C). The leadership team focus group consisted of seven members of the leadership team. Three of the leadership team focus group session consisted of assistant principals; three were guidance counselors, and the curriculum coordinator. This focus group session was held in the conference room near the front office of the school, and participants were assured that responses were confidential.

The survey results determined a slight modification to the focus group questions. Question 1 was changed to “Tell me about how teachers and staff work together to develop the school schedule” from “Tell me about the ways teachers work together to improve their instruction” because of the results from the School Culture Triage Survey suggested that there was a difference of opinion between the two survey groups.

The data from the School Culture Triage Survey was analyzed and some characteristics of the schools culture was be highlighted, which caused modification to the focus group questions. There were two survey questions that varied while the other 15 of the survey questions were similar.

## **Analysis**

Each survey question and the overall school score for the triage survey will be calculated twice, once for teachers and once for the leadership team. Questionnaire responses will also be analyzed separately to determine discrepancies in the perception of school culture between the two groups. Focus group questions were transcribed as answers were given, then typed into a document for further analysis. The researcher coded answers using pattern and axial coding due to the exploratory nature of the data. This also helped identify patterns and themes in the data (Saldana, 2010).

## **Chapter Four**

### **Results**

This study was proposed to collect descriptive and qualitative data concerning the perception of school culture between teachers and administrators. The schools' culture was measured using the School Culture Triage Survey. Then the data for each group was analyzed separately, and compared to identify similarities and difference in perceptions between the groups, and which factors were perceived differently. The results of this study were intended to highlight areas of the school culture that are not perceived the same between the two groups with the goal of unifying the groups and improving the school culture.

Data were obtained using the "School Culture Triage Survey" to collect survey responses for teachers and for the administration team at Barren County High School. This section discusses the survey results, with an analysis of the survey responses.

Data analysis was calculated for each research question utilizing the same procedure. These data were first collected using the School Culture Triage Survey. After collecting the data, the scores for each survey question were averaged for each group. The total number of respondents was 31 for the teacher group and 7 for the administrator group. The researcher arrived at this score by calculating the sum of all the scores, then dividing by the number of the scores. This was calculated for each survey question. The School Culture Triage Survey is divided into 3 sections; the first five questions are Professional Collaboration. The second section is Affiliative Collegiality. The third section is Self-Determination/Efficacy.

The survey results for teachers resulted in 31 total responses of the 74 total certified teachers at Barren County High School which is a 41.9% response rate. The survey was sent out via email, and reminders were sent out periodically for 30 calendar days. The survey results for the leadership team consisted of 10 total responses of the 12 members of the leadership team at Barren County High School which is an 83.3% response rate.

The composite score from the School Culture Triage Survey for teachers was a 67.6, which is categorized as good and suggestions are “monitor and maintain making positive adjustments”. The composite score for the administration was 68.5, 0.8 points higher than that of the teachers, which is a difference of 0.94% of the total possible score of 85. The number of respondents was too small for an accurate statistical analysis, but the goal of this study was to make a qualitative assessment of the areas with the greatest difference in analysis.

The survey results are summarized Table 1. The survey question is provided along with the average response from teachers, the average response from administrators and the difference.

The analysis of the survey also determined the focus group questions. The focus group questions served to assess the knowledge of the instructional vision of the teachers and administrators in the school, as well as assess the level of professional collaboration and affiliative collegiality of the staff.

Table 1

*Summarized Survey Results from Teachers and Administrators*

Survey Question	Average	Average	Difference
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	Teacher Response	Administrator Response	
Teachers and staff discuss instructional strategies and curriculum issues.	4.7	4.4	0.3
Teachers and staff work together to develop the school schedule.	2.6	3.8	1.2
Teachers and staff are involved in the decision-making process with regard to materials and resources.	3.6	4.2	0.6
The student behavior code is a result of collaboration and consensus among staff.	3.1	4.3	1.2
The planning and organizational time allotted to teachers and staff is used to plan as collective units/teams rather than as separate individuals.	4.0	3.5	0.5
Teachers and staff tell stories of celebrations that support the school's values.	4.6	4.2	0.4
Teachers and staff visit/talk/meet outside of the school to enjoy each others' company.	3.1	3.6	0.5
Our school reflects a true "sense" of community.	4.4	4.2	0.2
Our school schedule reflects frequent communication opportunities for teachers and staff.	4.3	3.9	0.4
Our school supports and appreciates the sharing of new ideas by members of our school.	4.4	4.3	0.1
There is a rich and robust tradition of rituals and celebrations including holidays, special events, and recognition of goal attainment.	4.1	4.0	0.1
When something is not working in our school, the faculty and staff predict and prevent rather than react and repair.	3.9	3.6	0.3
School members are interdependent and value each other.	4.4	4.0	0.4
Members of our school community seek alternatives to problems/issues rather than repeating what we have always done.	4.1	4.0	0.1
Members of our school community seek to define the problem/issue rather than blame others.	4.0	3.8	0.2
The school staff is empowered to make instructional decisions rather than waiting for supervisors to tell them what to do.	3.7	4.0	0.3
People work here because they enjoy and choose to be here.	4.6	4.7	0.1
Total	67.7	68.5	0.8



Table 2

*Summarized Categories of Response Comparing Teacher and Administrator Responses*

Survey Question	Category for Teacher Response	Category for Administrator Response
Teachers and staff discuss instructional strategies and curriculum issues.	Often	Often
Teachers and staff work together to develop the school schedule.	Rarely	Sometimes
Teachers and staff are involved in the decision-making process with regard to materials and resources.	Sometimes	Often
The student behavior code is a result of collaboration and consensus among staff.	Sometimes	Often
The planning and organizational time allotted to teachers and staff is used to plan as collective units/teams rather than as separate individuals.	Often	Sometimes
Teachers and staff tell stories of celebrations that support the school's values.	Often	Often
Teachers and staff visit/talk/meet outside of the school to enjoy each other's' company.	Sometimes	Sometimes
Our school reflects a true "sense" of community.	Often	Often
Our school schedule reflects frequent communication opportunities for teachers and staff.	Often	Sometimes
Our school supports and appreciates the sharing of new ideas by members of our school.	Often	Often
There is a rich and robust tradition of rituals and celebrations including holidays, special events, and recognition of goal attainment.	Often	Often
When something is not working in our school, the faculty and staff predict and prevent rather than react and repair.	Sometimes	Sometimes
School members are interdependent and value each other.	Often	Often
Members of our school community seek alternatives to problems/issues rather than repeating what we have always done.	Often	Often
Members of our school community seek to define the problem/issue rather than blame others.	Often	Sometimes
The school staff is empowered to make instructional decisions rather than waiting for supervisors to tell them what to do.	Sometimes	Often
People work here because they enjoy and choose to be here.	Often	Often

The survey results determined a slight modification to the focus group questions. The focus group selections were slightly modified based on the survey results from both groups as well as using the data in Table 2. The first focus groups question was modified from “Tell me about the ways teachers work together to improve their instruction” to “Tell me about how teachers and staff work together to develop the school schedule.” This was modified because the first survey question “Teachers and staff discuss instructional strategies and curriculum issues” was scored 4.7 by teachers and 4.4 for administrators, which puts them both in the category of “often”. The new focus group question was based on the survey selection of “Teachers and staff work together to develop the school schedule” which was scored 2.6 by teachers which is “Rarely” and 3.8 by administrators which is “Sometimes.” This was a relatively large difference in the survey results, which necessitated the change to the focus group question. This was the only focus group question that was modified.

The focus group questions that were used were as follows:

- 1) Tell me about how teachers and staff work together to develop the school schedule.
- 2) Tell me about how who establishes the behavior code and how it is monitored and enforced.
- 3) Describe the relationships among staff and some examples.
- 4) How does this school go about solving problems?
- 5) What is the instructional vision for this school? Who establishes it and how is it monitored?

## **Research Question 1**

Data analysis for research question 1 focused on the differences between administrator and teacher perceptions relative to the cultural dimension of professional collaboration. The first section of the survey focused on this research question. Survey Question 1 in this question was scored 4.7 “Often” by teachers and 4.4 “Often” by administrators. Survey question 2 in this section was scored 2.6 “Rarely” while administrators scored this same survey question 3.8 “Sometimes”, which is a qualitative difference, and the results fall in different categories. Survey question 3 in this section was rated 3.6 “sometimes” by teachers and 4.2 “Often” by administrators. Survey question 4 in this section was rated 3.1 “Sometimes” by teachers and 4.3 “Often” by administrators, which is difference greater than 1.0 and the results fall into different categories. Survey question 5 in this section was scored 4.0 “often” by teachers and 3.5 “Sometimes” by teachers. The categories are grouped by a range of scores, and differences in some questions and the different categories may still have a score that is very similar to the other. For example: the survey statement “Members of our school community seek to define the problem/issue rather than blame others” was scored 4.0 by teachers and 3.8 by administrators, which the scores are close, but they fall into different scoring categories.

Along with the first 5 survey selections under the category of “Professional Collaboration” on the School Culture Triage Survey, the first research question was measuring the perceptions of school culture from the perspective of the teachers and

administrators separately and it states “What are the differences between administrator and teacher perceptions relative to the cultural dimension of professional collaboration?”

According to the survey results, there are a few aspects of school culture that are perceived differently by teachers and administrators. One of the questions from the survey that had the greatest difference was question 2 “Teachers and staff work together to develop the school schedule.” This was scored at 2.6 by teachers, which is categorized as “Rarely” and 3.8 by administrators “sometimes”. Focus group question 1 was revised because of this discrepancy.

The first focus group question from the teachers had varied responses. Teacher 1 discussed the involvement of a focus group and communication from the department head to the rest of the department about how class times could be arranged differently. Teacher 2 expressed no knowledge of a focus group and stated that they have only been asked once “What would an ideal class schedule be?” Teacher 3 did not know about focus groups and discussion about classes or schedules and stated “I’ve been asked twice in the past twelve years my preference on block or skinny arrangement” of classes. Teacher 4 confirmed the existence of a focus group and their task was to determine and make suggestions about the new schedule that went into effect four years ago, but also stated that suggestions were largely ignored from their department. Teacher 5 discussed the role of department heads in schedule and decision making, but no knowledge of a focus group to help determine the new schedule that was developed four years ago. Teacher 6 had no knowledge of focus group for scheduling reasons, and thought the schedule was developed by the counselors and approved by the SBDM with no teacher

suggestions. Teacher 7 said that they had not seen any collaboration between the teachers and administration on the development of the schedule. Teacher 8 suggested that the collaboration between the guidance counselors and the teachers was worked to align their schedule because of the pathways that were offered in the career and technical area of curriculum, but the schedule was mostly made by the counselors and then given to the teachers to make suggestions, but rarely do suggestions lead to any changes in the schedule.

One administrator mentioned the existence of a committee that reviews and makes suggestions about the schedule. Three administrators stated that the scheduling ideas were sent to the department heads, and from there the department heads were to seek input from the teachers. Two administrators stated that the guidance counselors were in charge of the master schedule and communicated to the department heads. Two administrators stated that changes to the schedule were to go to the SBDM for approval.

Survey question 4 is “The student behavior code is a result of collaboration and consensus among staff” and was rated 3.1 “Sometimes” by teachers and 4.3 “Often” by administrators, which is difference greater than 1.0 and the results fall into different categories. Focus group question 2 addresses this aspect of school culture and it was slightly modified because of the survey results, and was changed to “Tell me about who establishes the behavior code and how it is monitored and enforced.” Teacher 1 stated “I have no idea who establishes the behavior code.” Teacher 2 stated that they thought there was a behavior team and that administration passes along what is acceptable and what isn’t. Teacher 2 also stated that behavior is not equally enforced. Teacher 3 stated that

the behavior code is set by SBDM, and that there is a consistency issue. Teacher 4 stated that there is a discipline committee and that teachers monitor the behavior and administration enforces. Teacher 5 stated knowledge of the discipline committee that reviews and revises discipline code before each school year but that there is a consistency issue. Teacher 6 stated knowledge of the discipline committee and that they meet annually to evaluate the discipline code. Teacher 7 stated that the administration establishes the behavior code for the school and that it was up to the teachers to establish the behavior code in their class. Teacher 8 expressed knowledge of the discipline committee and the SBDM and that there is a consistency issue in the enforcement of the rules.

Three of the administrators identified department heads as being the main contact between the general teacher population and the administrative team. One administrator discussed the role of a committee that meets to determine the schedule. One teacher said that the guidance counselors put the master schedule together, and then it's sent out to the department heads for consultation with teachers. The overall theme is that there is a master schedule which has been in place for several years, and from here, classes are added or subtracted as determined by the SBDM.

## **Research Question 2**

Research question 2 states "What are the differences between the perceptions of administrators and teachers regarding affiliative collegiality?" and this corresponds to the middle section of the survey and focus group question 3.

Data analysis for research question 2 focused on the differences between the perceptions of administrators and teachers regarding affiliative collegiality. The second section on the School Culture Triage Survey has 6 questions that focus on affiliative collegiality. Survey question 1 in this section was scored 4.6 by teachers and 4.2 by administrators. Survey question 2 in this section was scored 3.1 by teachers and 3.6 by administrators, both are “sometimes”. Survey question 3 in this section was scored 4.3, which is “often”, and 3.9, which is “sometimes” by teachers and administrators respectively. Survey question 4 in this section was scored 4.1 and 4.0, which is “often” by teachers and administrators respectively. Survey question 5 in this section was scored 4.4 and 4.3 which is “often” by teachers and administrators respectively. Survey question 6 was scored 4.1 and 4.0 by teachers and administrators respectively, which is “often” for both groups.

The survey question with the greatest discrepancy in regard to affiliative collegiality was “Teachers and staff visit/talk/meet outside of the school to enjoy each other’s company.” This was scored 3.1 by teachers and 3.5 by administrators, which for both groups is “sometimes”. Focus group question 3 supports this. Four teachers used the term “clique” or “cliquish” when describing the relationships among staff. Three teachers stated that the departments worked well together within the school, but did not mention any relationships outside of the school. Three teachers mentioned that there were some teachers that they knew of that had relationships outside of the school, and that some of these activities were things like “girls night” or a fishing trip. Two teachers stated that the relationships outside of the school varied among the teachers, but did not

elaborate with examples. This shows that there are relationships that “sometimes” develop outside the school.

For administrators, two used the term “clique” to describe the relationships within the building, but two others described the forming of small groups that sit together at lunch or at PD, and described cliques, but didn’t use the same terminology. Four stated that the working relationships were very positive within the departments, but there was very little cross curricular collaboration. One administrator gave a blanket statement stated “all staff work well, like family” and gave two examples on how staff are helpful in covering duties when needed. There was no mention from administrators that there were any relationships outside of the school building.

### **Research Question 3**

Research question 3 states “What are the differences between the perceptions of administrators and teachers regarding self-determination and efficacy?” and corresponds to the last section of the survey as well as focus group questions 4 and 5.

Data analysis for research question 3 focused on the differences between the perceptions of administrators and teachers regarding self-determination and efficacy. Survey question 1 in this section was scored 3.9 by teachers and 3.6 by administrators, which is “sometimes” for both groups. Survey question 2 in this section was scored 4.4 by teachers and 4.0 by administrators, which is “often” for both groups. Survey question 3 in this section was scored 4.1 by teachers and 4.0 by administrators, which is “often” for both groups. Survey question 4 in this section was scored 4.0 by teachers, which is “often” and 3.8 by administrators, which is classified as “sometimes”. Survey question 5



in this section was scored 3.7 “sometimes” by teachers and 4.0 “often” by administrators. Survey question 6 in this section was scored 4.6 by teachers and 4.7 by administrators respectively, which is “often” for both groups.

The survey question “when something is not working in our school, the faculty and staff predict and prevent rather than react and repair” was scored 3.9 by teachers and 3.6 by administrators, which is “sometimes” by both groups. The survey question “Members of our school community seek to define the problem/issue rather than blame others” was scored 4.0 by teachers which is “often” and 3.8 by administrators which is “sometimes”.

Focus group question 4 was aimed at determining the specific ways that the school handles problems. Three teachers stated that it depended on the problem at hand, and that problems were dealt with on an individual basis. Three teachers stated that the administration dealt with all the problems and very little input was ever sought from teachers. One teacher stated that the teachers were the ones dealing with the problems and stated that there was lack of involvement from administration. These responses suggest that problems are sometimes predicted and prevented from the teacher perspective.

For the administration team, two stated that problems are dealt with depending on the problem. This means that problems are dealt with differently depending on the situation. For example: cell phone violations are dealt with differently depending on the number of times a student has been reprimanded for this violation of school rules, and the punishment is not always the same. One stated that the principal sought input from staff

and was open to suggestions, and another stated that the staff was often to be involved in problem solving. This reflects the survey results that the school community seeks alternatives to problems rather than repeating what has always been done. Two administrators referred to the entire leadership team. One mentioned the SBDM and one stated “some problems are addressed through staff meetings” this would imply that the principal was in charge of these meetings. The responses here reflect that problems are dealt with on an individual basis and are sometimes predicted and prevented, which reflects the survey results.

#### **Research Question 4**

Research question 4 was “What are the implications for the school’s on-going improvement efforts?” which is addressed with focus group question 5 “What is the instructional vision for this school? Who establishes it and how is it monitored?” The goal of the focus group questions was to determine the general knowledge of the instructional vision for the school, as well as explore differences that emerged in the surveys.

Two of the teachers stated that there is not a clearly defined instructional vision, but the teachers hold themselves accountable. This suggests high self-efficacy in this staff, which supports the survey questions for self-efficacy. The other six teachers gave six different answers for the schools instructional vision, which shows that there is not a clearly defined instructional vision or if there is one for the school, it is not communicated to the staff. One teacher stated that it is data driven that and that we monitor it by closing the learning gap on the mandated standardized test scores. One

teacher stated “the CIP [sic] comes from the top down and is measured by continuous growth on state test scores.” One teacher stated that it was to “increase any and all academic test scores” and that this was monitored by state and district officials.

From seven different administrators, there were six different answers. One stated it was to “be distinguished” and referenced the state testing. One didn’t give a direct vision, but stated “we want the best” and referenced test scores. These responses suggest there isn’t a clearly defined instructional vision for the school, or if there is one, it is not communicated among the administration.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion**

Barren County High School has undergone two transitions to new principals from 2011 to 2015. The principal is not only the figure head of the school, he or she determines the culture and climate of a school (Fink & Resnick, 2001; Hallinger & Heck, 1998) and transitions in the principal can lead to transitions in thinking within the staff in that building (Beets, 2008). The beliefs of each principal have been different, and in these transitions aspects of the school culture have also shifted.

The overall data suggests that teachers and school leaders at Barren County High School have a similar opinion on 15 of 17 factors discussed and surveyed using the School Culture Triage Survey. The overall score given to the culture of Barren County High School was 67.7 for teachers and 68.5 for the school leadership team. This is a good score according to the School Culture Triage Survey, and puts it in the 60-74.9 range, which suggests monitor and maintaining positive adjustments. The school leadership team rated the school culture 0.8 higher than that of the teachers who completed the survey.

For 12 of the questions on the survey, the difference is less than 0.5 on a 1-5 scale. This suggests that teachers and administration hold similar opinions on these aspects of school culture. For 4 of the questions, there is a difference of 0.5 to 0.8, which suggests that the teachers and school administration have the same opinion on these aspects, but are areas where not everybody would agree. There are 2 questions where the difference is 1.2, which suggests that the teachers and leaders have difference of opinion

of these aspects of the school culture, and these are the aspects that will be more closely analyzed.

### **Research Question 1**

The first research question was a focus of the perspectives on professional collaboration, and the data suggests a disconnection between the teachers and administrators in this aspect of school culture. The overall low response to the survey can be described as systemic isolationism, where teachers and leaders both tend to stay within their own role in the schools, and are apathetic or unconcerned with factors that do not directly impact his or her role. For teachers, if it does not directly impact instruction in their classroom, they do not bother with it. For the leadership team, most did not mind responding to the survey (10 of 12 did respond), but when asked for focus group questionnaire responses, only 6 gave responses. Again, if the task was optional and did not directly impact their responsibilities (behavior, testing schedule, curriculum alignment, specific student concerns, etc.) they are not as likely to give responses. This could be a time issue, but many opportunities were given for times for responses, many just ignored attempts at contact. This reflects the attitude of professional collaboration. Survey and focus groups would have been an opportunity for the teachers and administrators to get together, give responses, and actually collaborate on aspects of the school culture, but this did not occur.

The first survey question that varied greatly (1.2) from one group to the other was the second question: Teachers and staff work together to develop the school schedule, which is a direct perspective of professional collaboration. This was the question that

warranted the change in the first focus group question. The average rating from teachers was 2.6, which is “rarely” on the School Culture Triage Survey, while the leadership team rated it at 3.8, which is “sometimes” on the School Culture triage survey, and very close to 4.0, which is often. The difference here suggests that teachers rarely feel included on development of school schedule, while the leadership team feels that teachers are included sometimes. But with a score of 3.8, we know that more of the leadership team scored this at 4 (often) or 5 (always). The difference here suggests that the leadership believes that teachers are being included in the making of the schedule, but teachers feel they are “rarely” a part of this process. According to the first focus group question, there was a common theme among the school leadership. This common theme was that scheduling ideas often were communicated with department heads, guidance counselors, and the entire leadership team. The teachers on the other hand, had little to no input; one teacher said that they have been asked twice in the twelve years that she has been here if they preferred skinny or block classes. Another teacher stated they had only been asked once since they’ve been here. One teacher made a reference to the scheduling being communicated to their department via email, but that was all the communication. One teacher made reference to a major schedule change where a committee was put together several years ago. The committee was made of teachers, administrators, and guidance counselors. Three administrators mentioned committees when scheduling, and all six administrators that were in the focus group session mentioned using department heads, the leadership team, and guidance counselors in scheduling matters.

The other survey question that was rated differently from teachers and school leaders was the fourth question: The student behavior code is a result of collaboration and consensus among staff. This also demonstrates the different views between the teachers and administrators about professional collaboration. This question was rated at 3.1, which is sometimes, for teachers and 4.3, which is often, for school leaders. One teacher out of 31 responses rated this question at a 5, while 7 rated this question at a 1 or 2. According to the leadership team, 4 responded with a 5. This suggests that administrators believe that the behavior code is established as a whole with equal input from teachers and administrators and that the behavior code is being enforced. Teachers on the other hand, only “sometimes” feel that the behavior code is a collaborative effort between teachers and the leadership team, and that the behavior code is not consistently enforced.

The first focus group question directly concentrates on professional collaboration in the form of asking how the school schedule is developed. This item had various responses from the teachers. Three of the teachers expressed little to no teacher input on the scheduling issues, they stated “I have never seen any collaboration between teachers and administrators” and “I have been asked once what an ideal schedule would be.” This is the type of wording that would reflect a staff that does not feel valued by the administration and they do not feel that they contribute to the school or the culture of the school (Deal & Peterson, 1999). Two of the teachers knew of the focus group that was developed to help determine the new schedule and two had discussed the role of department heads in communication their respective departments. What this reveals is that there is communication from administration to the department heads for suggestions

on scheduling, but the department heads are not consistent in passing that communication on the teachers in their department. There are at least two departments that the department heads met with, or communicated via email to the teachers, to get suggestions on the new schedule. Overall, there is very little communication from the administration to the teachers on scheduling issues. Six of the eight teachers had no knowledge of the focus group that was developed to make the new schedule four years ago, and three of the teachers in the focus group session thought that the class schedule was completely developed by the guidance counselors and administrators without any teacher input or suggestions.

The administration has a more consistent theme in this focus group question. Three of the administrators referenced the department heads, and I think this is one reason that the administration feels that there is a high level of teacher input on scheduling. The department heads are teachers, but only a small fraction of the entire staff. One administrator discussed the role of a committee that meets to determine the schedule. The overall theme is that there is a master schedule which has been in place for several years, and from here, classes are added or subtracted as determined by the Site Based Decision Making Council (SBDM). The department heads are contacted about this, but only two of the department heads communicate with the teachers in their department.

When comparing these answers of the teachers with the administrators, there is a clear difference in opinion which shows lack of cohesiveness and this would lead to lower moral in the teaching staff (Macneil, 2009). The teachers feel that there is not



much collaboration in developing the school schedule, where the administration feels that there are abundant opportunities for the teachers to provide feedback and input. In reality, there are times when there are opportunities for some teachers to provide input. These are the teachers in content areas where the department head communicates with the rest of the department. There are other departments where the department head does not communicate with the rest of the department, and these are the teachers who do not feel they are a part of the collaboration process.

The second focus group question also brings attention to professional collaboration within the building and there was a very clear common theme from the teachers in the second focus group question. While six of the teachers knew of the discipline committee, not all teachers are sure of who developed the behavior code, and question the effectiveness of the discipline committee. Six of the eight teachers also discussed that there are consistency issues when behavior is enforced. One example came from a teacher that stated “I wrote up two students for the exact same thing, cell phone violation, two weeks apart. One student received a warning while the other student was given a day of AC.” Another teacher expressed the consistency issue of enforcement from one class to another. What happens in one class isn’t always enforced in another. This is an issue when some students are allowed to use technology (smart phones) in one class but not another. Two other teachers agreed with this consistency issue. One teacher expressed concerns over the dress code violations. This is inconsistent from teacher to teacher and from administrator to administrator, for example: “Two students will wear very similar jeans with holes above the knee, both will get referred,

one will get sent back to class without any kind of correction, while the other student is made to change clothes.” This reflects an “isolationist” culture. As Sparks (2016) says this is “just how things are.” Each teacher deals with students differently, and how they deal with each student within their classroom is up to them, which is not bad in itself. The problem here is that rules are not consistently enforced by the administration from the teachers’ perspective, and rules are not consistently enforced in common areas, such as the hallway, cafeteria, and library. This does negatively impact the schools culture because students perceive the inconsistent enforcement as unfair. Teachers also feel that the inconsistency is unfair to students and student perception of teachers that enforce the rules. Three teachers stated that they have greatly reduced or stopped turning students in for dress code violations because they feel that the students see them as the “bad guy” which is a direct impact on the teachers’ relationships with the students, and culture because Gruennert (2008) states that school culture is “the collection of actions” which is now embedded in the culture of Barren County High School, and students feel the impact of this inconsistency. Another example of inconsistency was enforcement of the tobacco policy at the school. One teacher stated that they turned in four students at the same time for being together while smoking in a restroom, and they all got different punishments. One got a warning, one got a detention, and two were sent to the AC (Alternative Classroom) for a day. While we do not know the number of offense each student has, the punishment is perceived as unfair by the teacher who turns these students in.

Administration was very clear on who establishes the behavior code at Barren County High School: the discipline committee is charged with making changes to the

discipline code before each school year. The changes are then proposed to the SBDM for approval. One of the administrators was not aware of the discipline committee, but the rest were. One was not sure if the changes were proposed to the SBDM. Two of the administrators referenced the district handbook, which does outline behaviors, but there are handbooks that are specific to each school which further explain specific behavior that are issues in that school or to highlight the rules that are most commonly broken at that school.

## **Research Question 2**

Focus group question 3 draws attention to the affiliative collegiality of the teachers and administrators in the school and there was a common theme of positive working relationships among all the teacher results. There were four teachers that described the staff as dividing themselves into cliques. Only two used this word, but two others described how there are “certain groups that tend to get together”. This is a pattern among perceptions of the teachers and administrators. These groups are often exclusive to each other and not only exist within the school, but also outside of the school. This is not necessarily a negative; it does imply that there are collegial relationships within the building. This school does have a rather large size of 74 certified teachers, but many more support personnel and staff. One teacher did allude to the fact that we have “staggered planning times” so there are times when not all staff see each other, it seems that staff with common planning are more cordial to each other. One teacher mentioned the size and layout of the building itself; “with a building this size, and as spread out as it is, you just don’t see everybody, and some people you wouldn’t know if they still worked

here or not because you never see them.” One teacher did mention that it was a personal preference and that it can be good to keep your social and professional relationships separate. Two administrators mentioned that there were cliques within the staff, and two others described the cliques without using the term.

### **Research Question 3**

The focus group question that concentrates on self-determination and efficacy of the staff is focus group question 4. This question had various responses from the teachers. Three teachers stated that problems were dealt with on a case by case scenario and that it was dependent on the problem. Two of the teachers stated that the administration dealt with problems and that it depended on the type of problem. One teacher stated that they were labeled as a “complainer” by others within the building when trying to address actual and potential problems. The responses are varied, but all are dependent on administration and shows low self-determination among all the teachers who participated in the focus group session. Also, this type of reaction from the staff suggests that this was part of a toxic culture within the school; “Negative norms and values, hostile relations, and pessimistic stories deplete the culture” (Deal & Peterson, 1999). This also lowers moral of the teachers, which is a sign of negative school culture (Macneil 2009). Two of the teachers stated that when there is a problem, and a solution does not work, the administration takes the blame, but the search for a solution continues. This would increase a school’s administrative support and perceptions of school connectedness (Beets, 2008). This also shows that the administration is willing to try new ideas and is not afraid to fail in front of students and teachers, this is important to

communicate core values of everyday work. Teachers will then reinforce these same values in their actions and words, and students will too (Deal & Peterson, 1998).

Focus group question 5 also relates to self-determination and efficacy within the staff. The common theme for the teachers for focus group question 5 is that there is not a clearly defined instructional vision for the school. This means that there is a lack of clear focus to the school, which negatively impacts the school culture (Shannon, 2009). Two of the teachers stated that there is not a clearly defined instructional vision, but the teachers hold themselves accountable. The other six teachers gave six different answers for the schools' instructional vision. One teacher stated that it is data driven and they monitor it by closing the learning gap on the mandated standardized test scores. One teacher stated "the CIP [sic] comes from the top down and is measured by continuous growth on state test scores." One teacher stated it was to "increase any and all academic test scores" and this was monitored by state and district officials. State test scores can give us clear, defined, and measureable goals (Hattie, 1999), but this is not part of the clear instructional vision for the school. One teacher stated "The instructional vision is to remain a distinguished/progressing school" and this is established and monitored through the accountability scores. One teacher stated "I don't know who establishes the instructional vision for the school but it is to be distinguished in all aspects and to have all students college and career ready." The last teacher referred to continuous improvement and that there is no accountability for that. With this, Hattie (1999) implies that this is highly risky because leaders have to publicly declare what success means –

and they may not get there, at least not quickly, and Hattie also believes that success comes from defining measureable goals.

The administrators had varied responses to the instructional goals for the school. Of the seven that were involved in the focus group session, six different answers were given. The varied responses show that there is a lack of communication among administrators. With lack of communication comes lack of consistency in decision making. Two of the administrators said it was to get all students “career and college ready” which is part of the accountability of the school. The other answers given were: “to be distinguished”, “we want the best for our students”, “Continually make improvements”, “to teach each student individually”, and “to teach for student learning at a high level.” Based on the responses, the administration does not have a clear instructional vision for the school. A clear instructional vision would give clear focus, which is a sign of positive school culture, and increase the effectiveness of the school leadership (Shannon, 2009).

#### **Research Question 4**

There are several implications for further improvement within this school. We can learn from the difference in responses in the first focus group question is that the administration attempts to get feedback from teachers in the school in scheduling issues. But, the contact attempt gets to the teachers via department heads. Also, when the teachers receive communication, they do not feel their comments and suggestions are taken seriously. Two of the teachers stated directly that they felt ignored in this part of the process. Two of the teachers also stated that they’ve only been asked once and twice

their preference in the schedule, but nothing beyond that. This is a direct connection to a negative school culture (Deal & Peterson, 1999). The teachers do not feel valued because they feel they are ignored. This serves as a dividing force between the teachers and the administration, thus lowering the effectiveness of the school leadership, which negatively impacts the school culture (Shannon, 2009). A way to improve this aspect of school culture would be to increase the communication between the teachers and administrators. A possible suggestion would be to include a short session within a staff meeting that at first lets teachers know that scheduling for the following year is coming up, show them a proposed schedule, and allow them to give feedback. Staff meetings already happen regularly, and this would not take much additional time and give teachers the chance to give their opinion if they feel the need.

Another possible way to improve the professional collaboration would be to get the teachers and administrators working together on the behavior code, as well as enforcement. There are district and school policies that outline appropriate behavior, but the enforcement lacks consistency, which was highlighted by the teacher responses in the second focus group question. The student handbook, which used to be handed out to all students, but no longer does, has a “disciplinary policy” that outlines common offenses and punishments for those offenses. The idea of having this matrix of offense and punishments is to increase consistency in the enforcement of rules. This shows lack of instructional vision and common goals, which are important to establishing and maintaining a positive school culture (Macneil, 2009). There could be a combination of a different issues in relation to enforcement here: 1) Students could be getting different

punishments because of the number of offense is different for each student, and the teachers are not aware of the number of offense 2) principals may be enforcing multiple offenses in one punishment, which would make the punishment worse for one student than another, or 3) there could simply be too much gray area in the interpretation in the rules and/or punishments. The fact that this is now only available online may lead to some of this consistency because not all teachers know of this policy. If more knew about it, then teachers and administrators might understand the rules and punishments more clearly. This could potentially clear up any miscommunication by making the behavior code more visible to the teachers and students.

Another way to improve the school culture would be to increase the interactions and professional collaboration among teachers in the building. The previous research would suggest that fostering more chances for teachers to collaborate and interact would improve the communication among the teachers and would also increase the collegial relationships within the building, which would improve the culture (Deal & Peterson, 1999).

With a clear instructional vision, the schools teachers and leadership would have a clear and defined goal and common vision. This is would be a sign of positive school culture (Deal & Peterson, 2009). With a common vision, the cohesiveness would increase among all staff in the building, which would also be felt by the students in the building. Cohesiveness was one of the factors that can determine a positive school culture (Macneil, 2009). With a common, clearly defined goal, everybody (students,



teachers, and administrators), would a clear purpose, and this would also improve the culture.

### **Limitations of this Study**

There are many important limitations to be noted in this study. First, the participants all volunteered and this could impart bias for the results in those who responded were only those who had strong opinions in either direction for the survey. Less bias would be in this study if the response rate was higher.

Second, is human error. The researcher generated all data via Google forms and transferred data through different media. Also, focus group responses were transcribed as accounts were given. While the attempt to keep all data and responses accurate, human error still could have occurred.

This was also an action research study, limited to one school, and so its conclusion is not generalizable to other locations. However, action research is meant to inform the work of practitioners within a specific context, and so its intent is not to achieve broad generalizability. That said, educators interested in school culture and in similar contexts may find lessons valuable for their own work (Ferrance, 2000).

## Appendix A

### School Culture Triage Survey

Figure 1

# School Culture Triage Survey

SCORING: 1 = NEVER 2 = RARELY 3 = SOMETIMES 4 = OFTEN 5 = ALWAYS OR ALMOST ALWAYS

## Professional Collaboration

1. Teachers and staff discuss instructional strategies and curriculum issues. \_\_\_\_\_ 1 2 3 4 5
2. Teachers and staff work together to develop the school schedule. \_\_\_\_\_ 1 2 3 4 5
3. Teachers and staff are involved in the decision-making process with regard to materials and resources. \_\_\_\_\_ 1 2 3 4 5
4. The student behavior code is a result of collaboration and consensus among staff. \_\_\_\_\_ 1 2 3 4 5
5. The planning and organizational time allotted to teachers and staff is used to plan as collective units/teams rather than as separate individuals. \_\_\_\_\_ 1 2 3 4 5

## Affiliative Collegiality

1. Teachers and staff tell stories of celebrations that support the school's values. \_\_\_\_\_ 1 2 3 4 5
2. Teachers and staff visit/talk/meet outside of the school to enjoy each others' company. \_\_\_\_\_ 1 2 3 4 5
3. Our school reflects a true "sense" of community. \_\_\_\_\_ 1 2 3 4 5
4. Our school schedule reflects frequent communication opportunities for teachers and staff? \_\_\_\_\_ 1 2 3 4 5
5. Our school supports and appreciates the sharing of new ideas by members of our school. \_\_\_\_\_ 1 2 3 4 5
6. There is a rich and robust tradition of rituals and celebrations including holidays, special events and recognition of goal attainment. \_\_\_\_\_ 1 2 3 4 5

## Self-Determination/Efficacy

1. When something is not working in our school, the faculty and staff predict and prevent rather than react and repair. \_\_\_\_\_ 1 2 3 4 5
2. School members are interdependent and value each other. \_\_\_\_\_ 1 2 3 4 5
3. Members of our school community seek alternatives to problems/issues rather than repeating what we have always done. \_\_\_\_\_ 1 2 3 4 5
4. Members of our school community seek to define the problem/issue rather than blame others. \_\_\_\_\_ 1 2 3 4 5
5. The school staff is empowered to make instructional decisions rather than waiting for supervisors to tell them what to do. \_\_\_\_\_ 1 2 3 4 5
6. People work here because they enjoy and choose to be here. \_\_\_\_\_ 1 2 3 4 5

## Scoring the School Culture Triage Survey

The lowest triage score is 17 and the highest score is 85. After using the triage questions in several program evaluations, our data suggest the following:

17–40 Critical and immediate attention necessary. Conduct a full-scale assessment of your school's culture and invest all available resources in repairing and healing the culture.

41–59 Modifications and improvements are necessary. Begin with a more intense assessment of your school's culture to determine which area is in most need of improvement.

60–75 Monitor and maintain making positive adjustments.

76–85 Amazing! We have never had a score higher than 75!

Before engaging in an elaborate and extensive analysis of the school culture, this quick assessment of current status can assist in determining the wise allocation of time and resources.

## Appendix B

### Email from Principal

11/14/2016

Re: Research Project - Pniewski, Luke

## Re: Research Project

Johnson, Brad

Thu 7/7/2016 1:14 PM

To: Pniewski, Luke <[luke.pniewski@barren.kyschools.us](mailto:luke.pniewski@barren.kyschools.us)>;

Yes

Sent from my iPhone

On Jul 7, 2016, at 1:09 PM, Pniewski, Luke <[luke.pniewski@barren.kyschools.us](mailto:luke.pniewski@barren.kyschools.us)> wrote:

I'm about to start with a research project that I started 2 summers ago. I got permission from Mr. Riley then, but my research has been delayed, so I'm just asking you if its okay with you.

It's not invasive, all I'm going to do is send out an email asking teachers and administrators to complete a survey online. After that, I'm going to have a small focus group session with about 5 teachers and another one with about 5 people of the "administration team" which would be some principals and some guidance counselors.

The survey is the "School Culture Triage Survey". It takes about 5-10 minutes and you could find a copy of it if you google it.

So, is it still okay if I send out this survey?

Luke Pniewski

Appendix C

Consent Forms

**INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT**  
**Focus Group**

**Project Title:** Administrator and Teacher Perception of School Culture  
**Investigator:** Luke Pniewski, Western Kentucky University,  
Department of Education Administration  
Email: luke.pniewski@barren.kyschools.us



You are being asked to participate in a project conducted through Western Kentucky University. The University requires that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project.

**You must be 18 years old or older to participate in this research study.**

The investigator will explain to you in detail the purpose of the project, the procedures to be used, and the potential benefits and possible risks of participation. You may ask any questions you have to help you understand the project. A basic explanation of the project is written below. Please read this explanation and discuss with the researcher any questions you may have.

If you then decide to participate in the project, please sign this form in the presence of the person who explained the project to you. You should be given a copy of this form to keep.


1. **Nature and Purpose of the Project:** The purpose of this project is to assess the perceptions of teachers and administrators regarding the school's culture.
2. **Explanation of Procedures:** This portion of the study will involve your participation in a focus group interview that is hoped to take approximately an hour. This focus group will be recorded with your permission.
3. **Discomfort and Risks:** There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study, thought there may be unforeseen risks.
4. **Benefits:** The possible benefits of this study include improving school culture in your school, unifying faculty and staff around common goals and increased student achievement as a result of improved school culture.
5. **Confidentiality:** Focus group discussions will be digitally recorded and transcribed. The researcher will create code for confidentially identifying each focus group participant. Only the identification codes will appear in the transcripts. All data will be stored securely at Western Kentucky University.
6. **Refusal/Withdrawal:** Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may be entitled to from the University. Anyone who agrees to participate in this study is free to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty.

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*You understand also that it is not possible to identify all potential risks in an experimental procedure, and you believe that reasonable safeguards have been taken to minimize both the known and potential but unknown risks.*

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

9-30-16  
Date

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness

9/30/16  
Date

- I agree to the audio/video recording of the focus group. *(Initial here)* \_\_\_\_\_

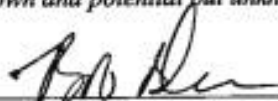
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THE WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD  
Paul Mooney, Human Protections Administrator  
TELEPHONE: (270) 745-2129

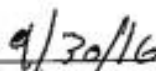


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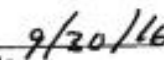


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\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

- I agree to the audio/video recording of the focus group. (Initial here) \_\_\_\_\_

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*Jana A. Griffith*  
Signature of Participant

9/30/2016  
Date

*[Signature]*  
Witness

9/30/16  
Date

- I agree to the audio/video recording of the focus group. (Initial here) *JB*

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\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

9-27-16  
Date

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness

9/27/16  
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Trina Rickard

Signature of Participant

9-27-16

Date

[Signature]

Witness

9/27/16

Date

- I agree to the audio/video recording of the focus group. *(Initial here)* \_\_\_\_\_

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Carrie J. Bunch  
Signature of Participant

9-26-16  
Date

[Signature]  
Witness

9/26/16  
Date

- I agree to the audio/video recording of the focus group. *(Initial here)* \_\_\_\_\_

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Joe Leftwich  
Signature of Participant

9-27-16  
Date

Lee P. L.  
Witness

9/27/16  
Date

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Angie Inman  
Signature of Participant

9.27.16  
Date

Libby  
Witness

9/27/16  
Date

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*David McLean*  
Signature of Participant

9/27/16  
Date

*Paul Mooney*  
Witness

9/27/16  
Date

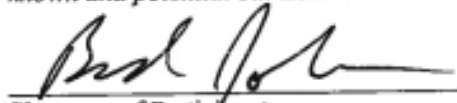
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Signature of Participant

7/22/16  
Date

  
Witness

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Date

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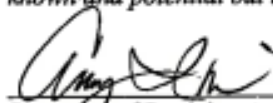
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